



Cornell University
John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Document Title: Close Reading and Evidence
Author: Aoise Stratford

Course: Performing and Media Arts 1108
Course Title: Drama Down Under: Theatre of Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific

Year of Award: Fall 2012

Copyright Statement:

This material is copyrighted by the author and made available through the Cornell University eCommons Digital Repository under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial License.

This document is part of the John S. Knight Writing in the Disciplines First-year Writing Seminar Program collection in Cornell's eCommons Digital Repository.
<http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/10813>.

Fall 2012 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in and/or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning Writing Exercises and Handouts will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing.)

The two winning entries will receive \$350; honorable mentions (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Friday, December 14. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2012 Knight Award for Writing Exercises

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only.~

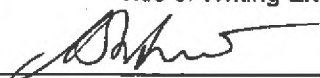
Instructor's name Aoise Stratford CUID # 1838721 aas68
Department PMA Course # and title 1108. Drama Down Under

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna O'Hara (dlo1@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Cloze Reading + Evidence

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature



Date 12/2/12

Aoise Stratford
PMA 1108 – Drama Down Under: Fall 2012.
Submission for The Knight Award in Exercises

About the worksheet:

Attached is one of three worksheets I designed for a FWS on Australian and Pacific drama. Worksheets were used in class and at home in collaboration with assigned readings, mini-lectures, and writing assignments. Midterm questionnaire feedback, in-class student comments, and introductions to end of term portfolios all spoke to the effectiveness of the worksheets. I am really happy with the way these worksheets put lessons into practice, stimulated student engagement and discussion, and contributed meaningfully to the work of the essays.

The worksheet submitted here was used over the course of two classes as we worked on turning close reading into clear analysis. This was prework for the second paper of the semester and classes up until this point had focused on three main topics: 1) strategies for active reading, 2) approaches for integrating sources into your writing, and 3) the clarity of the basic sentence as a building block for essay writing. This assignment sequence sought to bring those things together in preparation for writing a basic analysis paper in which students were asked to choose a character and an idea from Louis Nowra's play *The Golden Age*¹ and then analyze how that character is used to express one of the play's central ideas.

The worksheet states its rationales, particularly for part two, as one thing that really struck me in Writing 7100 was the importance of explaining to students what you have in mind and why they are being asked to do certain things.

In preparation for this exercise, students had read the play and chapters two and three in Williams's and Colomb's Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace. These two particular chapters focus on active language and characters as subjects respectively, and stress the connection between clarity and writing that "make[s] characters the subjects of verbs naming...actions" (23). This was a good reading to pair with work on character analysis, as it kept the notion of 'characters' and 'actions' central at all stages of reading, thinking and writing. We had also had mini-lectures on analysis as a rhetorical strategy and on the dramaturgical concept of character.

How it worked:

Exercise: After an introductory discussion of the readings, we broke into pairs to answer prompts about the title. At the end of the work session, students shared their favorite alternative titles with the class and we talked about why they were chosen. Then we made a list on the board of all the ages people had found. **Rationale:** My thinking here was that the title is a very specific

¹ For the purpose of this exercise, any text that is rich in 'readable' signs works well, such as poems or fiction, but it could also be adapted to other writing or visual media. In this case I used *The Golden Age*, an Australian drama about the rediscovery of a group of people, missing since the gold rush. This play raises lots of questions and has a diverse cast of interesting characters.

and manageable selection from the text, but that it is also richly layered and resonates throughout the play in multiple ways. Getting students to work in such detail on just three words was a great exercise in close, specific reading as an approach to getting ideas for writing.

Exercise: Springboarding from our discussion of the title as a point of entry, we then collectively generated a list of the ideas expressed in the play. I asked students to identify binaries that struck them in light of the work they had done on the title—lost/found, old/new, forgotten/remembered, civilized/primitive, etc. **Rationale:** Creating this simple list allowed us to put into practice another approach to writing preparation: brainstorming. I wanted to do it as a class, so that everyone could see just how many ideas were there and gain confidence from that. The shared discussion format gave everyone ownership and more easily allowed ideas to be modified, added or discarded as we considered what might fit the scope of the paper.

Exercise: In part two of the worksheet, students took one of the paired ideas from the brainstormed class list and went through the text looking for specific places where they saw that idea articulated. Students were asked to be specific about which character that idea was connected to and to list a page number to go back to. **Rationale:** This led students back to the text, armed with some fresh critical thinking, new ideas, and tools for analysis. Having a really specific task to orient their reading helped them focus and be productive, re-engaging with the text rather than trawling aimlessly through it.

Exercise: Students started part three in our second class and completed it at home. This exercise asked students to write about a character from various angles and analyze that character in the play. I gave an example of an inactive sentence “isolation is expressed by William” and an active sentence “William is isolated.” Students were encouraged to write actively, though next time I teach this I will put more emphasis on this component of the exercise. **Rationale:** The idea here was to use the prompts from close reading and class discussion to generate ideas that could then be developed into paragraphs focused around an observation or pair of observations, and using the text as support for those claims. Setting it out on a worksheet like this allowed students to proceed in small steps but also observe the structure emerging: claim and support, connected ideas. As the exercise specifically required students to write about dramatic characters and their actions (people doing or being things), it was a particularly apt exercise for practicing writing in active sentences. In the original version of the worksheet, however, I found that my instructions about active writing were not clear enough (students thought they applied only to the last prompt), so I revised the instructions in part three for future use and supplemented with an in-class worksheet on passive language from Hacker’s A Writer’s Reference the following week.

Over all, this worksheet was very effective, both in engaging students, and in deepening students’ understanding of the play and the way a dramatic text is put together. More importantly, however, it gave students clear strategies for conducting close reading and turning critical thinking into preparation for writing. Students found they were able to generate fruitful paths through the reading and come up with ideas for the essay based on careful observation. They were actively engaged with the text in a way that brought reading and writing together and helped structure ideas, write actively, and use the text to support analytical positions. The revised final prompt strengthens the exercise. This worksheet is easily adaptable for use with any literary text, and may well, with further reconfiguration, serve for other texts also.

PART TWO. TRACKING IDEAS: Close reading for details can generate lots of useful information, but what do you do next? When you are writing an essay, most often you will need to assert something about the texts you are working with, and then use examples to support your position. This is the basis of an argument, but being able to cite examples is important for other kinds of writing too, particularly analysis. In this exercise we will continue to mine the text of *The Golden Age* for details, building on the close reading work we have already done. Choose one of the binaries from class discussion and, working in small groups, go through the play and make a list of where you see that idea expressed either literally or theatrically in the play. Write out the line that expresses the idea and be sure to note who says it. Include a page # so you can go back to it.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

PART THREE: CHARACTER

Choose a character from the play who is implicated in your list from part two. Answer the prompts below, noting the page number where you find the evidence that supports your analysis. Here we are talking specifically about characters and action so **keep your language clear, specific and active**. "Put characters in subjects and actions in verbs" (Clarity and Grace)

Name:

Two Physical traits:

Two Social/Cultural traits:

Two Psychological traits:

What does this character want?

What stands in the way of that?

What does he or she risk if he or she does not achieve his or her desire?

Does he or she get it in the end?

How does the playwright show us this character? What key moments in his or her life and in his or her journey does he choose?

ESSAY TWO: Character Analysis Paper

Due in class: Tuesday 9/18.

Characters cause plot, establish tone, show us the world, and ARE the meaning of the play. In most conventional dramas, the play's ideas, what the play is about, are articulated through and by characters pursuing what they want against various obstacles.

Write a character analysis for a character in *The Golden Age* in which you analyze HOW your character is used to express one of the play's central ideas. Your essay should do three things.

1: Include a summary of your character's life, explaining briefly the key events of his or her life as shown or told by the play (including backstory), and saying how they fit into the overall fabric of the play.

2: Describe your character in terms of the three key aspects of character--physical traits, psychological traits, and social influences. Be specific and support your interpretation with illustrations from the play. Use quotes and paraphrase and cite them with page numbers.

3: Say how you think your character is used by the playwright to express some of the features of the world he creates, or put another way, how your character shows us the key ideas that the play is grappling with: "loss and recovery" for example. How is this central idea tied to what your character wants or risks? Remember, this is a play, so think about your chosen character as a performed entity, in time and space. How are they seen by us?

This paper should be not less than three and not more than four pages long.

As with all essays, you will need to format correctly. 1-1.25 inch margins, 12 point font, your name and class at the top of the page, and page numbers. You do NOT need to include a works cited page for this essay. Be sure to keep a back up. ALWAYS proof read before turning in your work.